

Dear Senator McCrory and Representative Currey, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Representative Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Gabrielle Barnes and I am a resident of Hartford, Connecticut. I am testifying in support of S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers.

All students deserve to feel safe, secure, and supported in their places of learning. Yet too often our schools rely on policing to keep children in line, rather than funding professionals trained to deliver students necessary developmental and behavioral health resources.

I went to a school that had a school resource officer. He was actually a very good friend of my mom's. As a result, I had a great relationship with him. To this day, when we see each other it's a loving and joyful experience. But, my personal experience with one officer does not change nor does it negate the evidence that we've spent too much of our education budget(s) on an intervention that is not effective and causes more harm to our children, their futures, and our school systems than we should have ever allowed.

In one of many conversations with my spouse about his day at work, where he offers lessons to students in an elementary school, I learned that a child no more than 7 years old was tackled, handcuffed, and arrested. After several years of these dinner table conversations, I learned that this is not uncommon.

What kind of world do we live in that it's okay to arrest children?

What kind of world do we live in that we see a rise in children experiencing mental health crises and rather than stop to ask "are the kids okay? Are we doing things right?" we choose to throw carceral punishment on the problem?

It makes so much sense to say, "not all school resource officers," because that statement is true. But this isn't about individuals, this is about the criminalization of our children. We've tried school resources officers and all we're getting is more criminals. We aren't getting solutions to the social-emotional problems our children are facing. When you buy something that doesn't work, you don't buy 10 more (I hope). Let's give CT school children a chance at a better future by putting our education budget toward solutions that work. Every dollar spent on an SRO is one less dollar that could go towards proactively and positively supporting our children with counselors, psychologists, nurses, and other support staff.

Here are a few undeniable reasons to support SB 1095:

1. According to Connecticut Voices for Children, there's no evidence that School Resource Officers (SROs) make students or staff safer, but schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than their peer institutions without SROs.

- Students in schools with SROs were over three times more likely to be arrested than students in schools without SROs. For Black and Latino/a/x students, the risk of arrest was over five times higher in schools with SROs than in schools without SROs.
2. Students who were diverted to social services or school officials were less likely to reoffend than students who were arrested for engaging in similar behavior.
 3. The recommended ratio by the American School Counselor association is 250:1. CT overall student-to-counselor ratio is 343:1, with higher fluctuations in our cities.
 - 1.7 million* students are in schools with police but no counselors
 - 3 million* students are in schools with police but no nurses
 - 6 million* students are in schools with police but no school psychologists
 - 10 million* students are in schools with police but no social workers
 - 14 million* students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker

*While these statistics aren't exact for Connecticut (that data was not available at the time of this writing), these scenarios are true for our state.

I strongly support S.B. 1095. I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will listen to their constituents who support this bill and voted for you in order to be heard. Together, we can build an educational system that centers the social-emotional well-being of students through care, resources, learning, and restoration.

Thank you for your time,

Gabrielle Barnes
Hartford, CT